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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000014

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SUBJECT: REGIME'S NEW TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS TAKING SHAPE

REF:QA. 07 Minsk 950

QB. 04 Minsk 459

[1](#)C. 07 Minsk 1035

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On January 1 a GOB decision came into force that replaced exit permit stamps in Belarusian passports with an "electronic black list" of persons banned from travel outside Belarus. The first uses of the new policy to ban travel for opposition political and civil society activists have already come to light. United Civic Party Chair Lebedko has been notified by mail that he has been banned from leaving Belarus. A former political prisoner told A/DCM that he is aware of several additional cases of activists receiving informal notice that they will not be permitted to depart the country. Since the system is still in its infancy, the number of oppositionists forbidden to travel abroad is likely to rise. End summary.

New Travel Restrictions Enter Into Force

[1](#)2. (C) With the start of the new year, a GOB decision eliminating Soviet-style exit permit stamps in Belarusian passports and replacing them with an electronic list of persons forbidden to travel abroad has entered into force (ref A). The so-called "black list" is reported to include persons with access to state secrets, persons with debts, and persons facing civil or criminal court action or completing sentences. According to public statements by representatives of the GOB, the list includes as many as 100,000 names (over one per cent of the population).

Lebedko Receives Official Notice of Travel Ban

[1](#)3. (C) In a January 4 meeting at UCP headquarters, Chairman Anatoliy Lebedko showed the Charge the official notification he had received from the authorities that he has been placed on the "black list" and is forbidden from leaving Belarus. Lebedko, who was able to travel without restriction to the U.S. in December 2007, reportedly has been denied permission to leave the country because of a criminal case opened against him in 2004 for anti-regime statements made to a Russian television journalist (refs B and C). The case was never tried because of the alleged inability to collect evidence from Russian authorities.

14. (C) While Lebedko is the first member of the opposition to be banned from travel abroad under the new system, he is apparently not the only one. Timofey Dranchuk, a former political prisoner and leader of the prisoners' rights NGO "Nad Bar'yerom" told A/DCM that several of his opposition colleagues have been informally notified that they too have been included in the travel ban. Dranchuk opined that since the system was new, it would likely be the end of the month before the scale of the GOB's use of the new regulations to ban travel by the opposition would be known.

15. (C) Aleksey Korol, editor in chief of "Novy Chas" and a former Deputy Chair of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party "Gramada," (BSDP-G) told A/DCM January 9 that, so far, he was not aware of any independent journalists who had been forbidden to travel abroad. Likewise, Anatoliy Levkovich, the acting Chair of BSDP-G, told A/DCM that so far Lebedko was the only opposition politician he knew to be covered by the ban.

Comment

16. (C) We have not yet heard of people who have been turned back by passport control. In any case, we have every reason to believe that this new procedure will be applied inequitably against members of the opposition. (Exit permission had in the past been withheld capriciously from opposition leaders, including Christian Democrat Pavel Severinets, who received his exit stamp only days before his December travel to the U.S.) We will continue to remind our interlocutors that the right to leave Belarus for travel abroad is a fundamental principle of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, and that moves to deprive Belarusians of this right for political reasons could

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threaten normal trade relations between Belarus and the United States.

Moore